



The Angel & the Child.

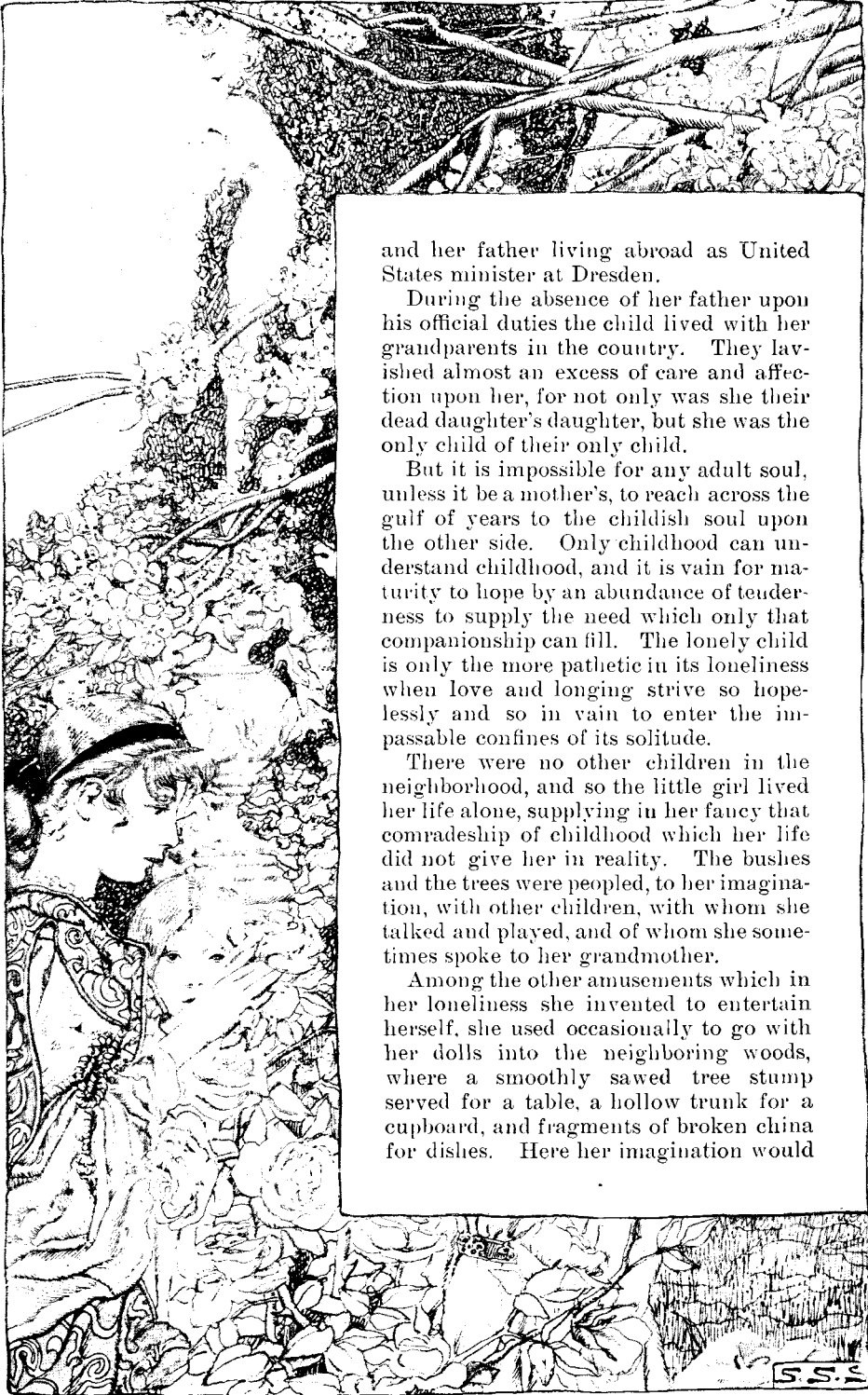
BY HOWARD PYLE

CHILDREN do not see the world as men and women behold it. The flowing integument that surrounds the soul is as yet tender and translucent. The light from beyond shines more easily through its filmy veil, and in that light the things of nature are melted into a glamour such as older eyes are too dim to perceive. The world of childhood is newer and more beautiful with life; the sun is more radiant; the ether is more buoyant than in the more sombre and the darker world of after-life.

Heaven and earth, as it were, touch together, and just beyond the thin and misty veil of separation spirits walk and rustle, and their whisperings sometimes, haply, reach the tender ear without its hearing to understand the words.

The two spaces are but a hand's-breadth apart, and it may easily be but a step from one to the other.

A certain little girl lived entirely alone in her world of childhood. She had neither brother nor sister nor playmate, and she was an orphan, her mother having died before she could remember her,



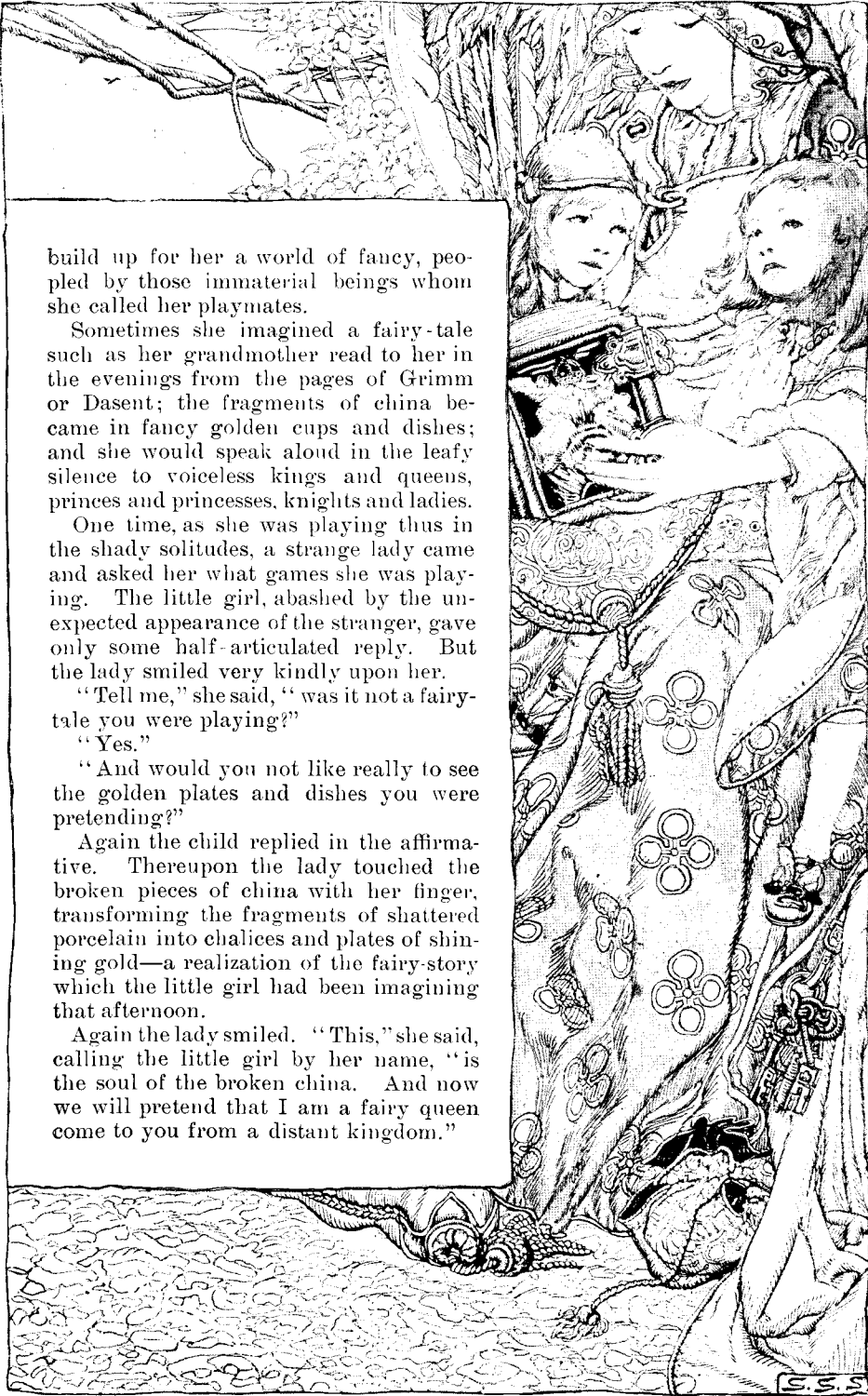
and her father living abroad as United States minister at Dresden.

During the absence of her father upon his official duties the child lived with her grandparents in the country. They lavished almost an excess of care and affection upon her, for not only was she their dead daughter's daughter, but she was the only child of their only child.

But it is impossible for any adult soul, unless it be a mother's, to reach across the gulf of years to the childish soul upon the other side. Only childhood can understand childhood, and it is vain for maturity to hope by an abundance of tenderness to supply the need which only that companionship can fill. The lonely child is only the more pathetic in its loneliness when love and longing strive so hopelessly and so in vain to enter the impassable confines of its solitude.

There were no other children in the neighborhood, and so the little girl lived her life alone, supplying in her fancy that comradeship of childhood which her life did not give her in reality. The bushes and the trees were peopled, to her imagination, with other children, with whom she talked and played, and of whom she sometimes spoke to her grandmother.

Among the other amusements which in her loneliness she invented to entertain herself, she used occasionally to go with her dolls into the neighboring woods, where a smoothly sawed tree stump served for a table, a hollow trunk for a cupboard, and fragments of broken china for dishes. Here her imagination would



build up for her a world of fancy, peopled by those immaterial beings whom she called her playmates.

Sometimes she imagined a fairy-tale such as her grandmother read to her in the evenings from the pages of Grimm or Dasent; the fragments of china became in fancy golden cups and dishes; and she would speak aloud in the leafy silence to voiceless kings and queens, princes and princesses, knights and ladies.

One time, as she was playing thus in the shady solitudes, a strange lady came and asked her what games she was playing. The little girl, abashed by the unexpected appearance of the stranger, gave only some half-articulated reply. But the lady smiled very kindly upon her.

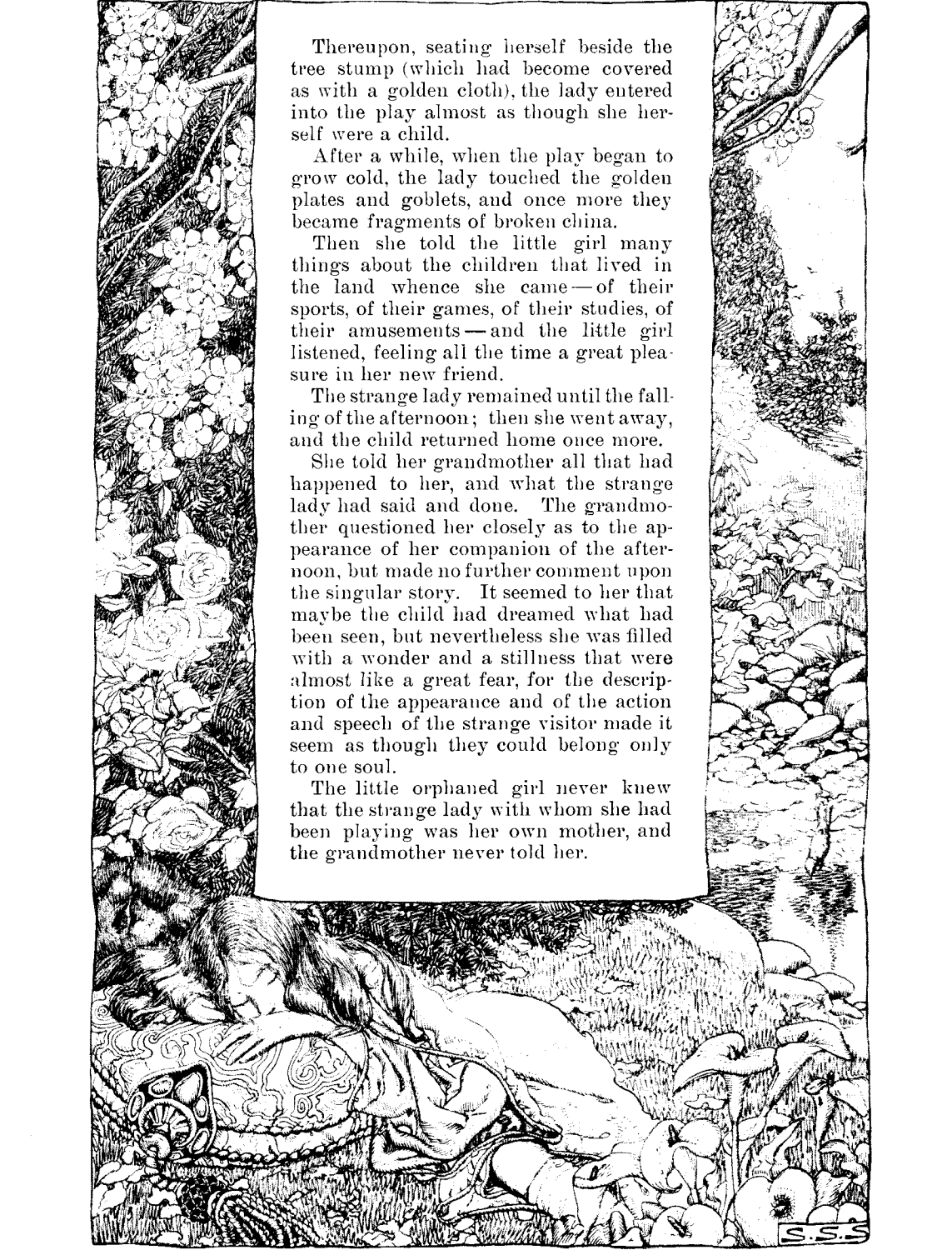
"Tell me," she said, "was it not a fairy-tale you were playing?"

"Yes."

"And would you not like really to see the golden plates and dishes you were pretending?"

Again the child replied in the affirmative. Thereupon the lady touched the broken pieces of china with her finger, transforming the fragments of shattered porcelain into chalices and plates of shining gold—a realization of the fairy-story which the little girl had been imagining that afternoon.

Again the lady smiled. "This," she said, calling the little girl by her name, "is the soul of the broken china. And now we will pretend that I am a fairy queen come to you from a distant kingdom."



Thereupon, seating herself beside the tree stump (which had become covered as with a golden cloth), the lady entered into the play almost as though she herself were a child.

After a while, when the play began to grow cold, the lady touched the golden plates and goblets, and once more they became fragments of broken china.

Then she told the little girl many things about the children that lived in the land whence she came—of their sports, of their games, of their studies, of their amusements—and the little girl listened, feeling all the time a great pleasure in her new friend.

The strange lady remained until the falling of the afternoon; then she went away, and the child returned home once more.

She told her grandmother all that had happened to her, and what the strange lady had said and done. The grandmother questioned her closely as to the appearance of her companion of the afternoon, but made no further comment upon the singular story. It seemed to her that maybe the child had dreamed what had been seen, but nevertheless she was filled with a wonder and a stillness that were almost like a great fear, for the description of the appearance and of the action and speech of the strange visitor made it seem as though they could belong only to one soul.

The little orphaned girl never knew that the strange lady with whom she had been playing was her own mother, and the grandmother never told her.